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19 December 1985

NATO set to act on technology leakage

By Walter Andrews
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

NATO defense ministers for the first time have agreed to cooperate to stem the flow of advanced Western military technology to the communist Warsaw Pact nations, sources said yesterday.

The sources said agreement reached last week in Paris was the culmination of four years of effort by U.S. negotiators to gain the help of the European defense ministers within the framework of the multilateral coordinating committee on trade — the co-called COCOM.

The ministers have cooperated before on an informal basis, the sources said. But last week's agreement marked the first time they agreed to cooperate formally "in an institutional sense" for overall control of technology exports through COCOM.

COCOM, which is made up of the United States, NATO countries and Japan, controls exports to the Soviet Union and its allies. Pentagon officials have complained for years that the committee was not strict enough in limiting exports of advanced technology with military value.

This technology leakage has been a major deterrent to joint development of weapons by the United States and its European allies.

CIA estimates show that NATO spends more on defense than the Warsaw Pact, but gets fewer weapons for it. Earlier this year, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Les Aspin, Wisconsin Democrat, said the estimates raised the question of whether the Soviet block countries are more efficient, or just build lower-quality weapons.

In a September Pentagon report on military technology exports, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger warned that Soviet efforts to obtain Western technology "are far greater than previously believed" and have helped produce Soviet jet fighters, space-based chemical laser weapons and a reusable space shuttle.

The first indication of the new agreement came in a speech yesterday by Deputy Defense Secretary William Howard Taft IV to the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The Allied record in the last several months is a good indication of our commitment to stemming the tide of technology to the Warsaw Pact. Technology security does not preclude [NATO weapons development] cooperation, but must pre-

cede it," Mr. Taft said.

Asked to elaborate after his speech, Mr. Taft said the Pentagon had been working with the multilateral coordinating committee on trade over the past four months on the military effects of leaked technology.

"They're [COCOM] having some meetings. I can't go into it in too much detail because the negotiations are still going on. But we have made some very good steps," he said.

Other sources said the Allied defense ministers agreed last week during negotiations in Paris to work within the framework of COCOM.

Mr. Taft said NATO cooperation on the design and purchase of weapons is urgent because, while the need for defense spending continues, pressure for budget cuts is increasing.

"NATO is on the verge of a new era of cooperation that offers a chance for more efficient use of each nation's vital research and development resources," he said.

Mr. Taft said cooperation between the United States and its allies is needed particularly in areas where NATO is deficient — anti-aircraft weapons; the ability to strike enemy forces being moved forward as reinforcements; anti-submarine warfare; and communications systems secure from eavesdropping.

Technology security is the toughest issue facing NATO, he said. "We cannot afford to allow vital military technologies to be compromised, nullifying any advantage the alliance may gain from cooperative research and development. I believe, however, that we can overcome this concern."

Mr. Taft said another concern is political interference in the awarding of contracts to various NATO nations for joint development efforts, an apparent reference to the pressure Great Britain exerted on behalf of an English company for the U.S. Army's \$4.5 billion contract for a new field communications system.

The selection of a French company instead proves "that cooperative development decisions can be made solely on military and efficiency criteria even in a highly charged political climate," he said.

The deputy secretary said there are some concerns that need to be addressed, such as the worry of U.S. companies that they will be subsidizing competition and the possibility that joint ventures could lead to the formation of cartels.